



AHEAD WITH HORSES INC.

10157 Johanna Avenue • Shadow Hills, CA 91040 • (818) 767 – 6373 • fax (818) 767 – 6231
www.AWHLA.org Tax ID#: 95-3165603

How Horses Can Help Your Child

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) recognizes that the movement of a horse and related activities can help address impairments and functional limitations in individuals (APTA, 2000). At AHEAD With Horses Inc., we have personally seen in a multitude of ways, how a horse can improve the life of a disabled child. Many children begin the AWH program unable to lift their head, cannot use hands or arms, move legs, crawl, sit, stand or walk, focus attention, follow directions, control behavior, or speak. Once in the program, we have seen thousands of children say their first words, take their first steps, and reach many other milestones never thought possible, such as a child holding their head up for a minute longer, their body motion become more fluid and their balance improved, or a giant smile from an “unresponsive child”. All of these results come from a child riding on the back of a wondrous therapeutic horse.

How It Can Help:

- Improvements in trunk Control, balance, muscle tone and strength
- Improved coordination and faster reflexes
- Increased muscular control
- Improved postural control
- Decreased spasticity and increase in flexibility
- Increased range of motion of joints
- Stretching of tight or spastic muscles
- Increased endurance and low-level cardiovascular conditioning
- Stimulates sensory integration and concentration
- Improved spatial awareness and perceptual skills
- Improved gross and fine motor skills and coordination
- Improved self-confidence and pride
- Increased self-esteem and self-image
- Development of patience
- Emotional control, self-discipline and self-awareness
- Cognitive skills
- Speech and language skills
- Expansion of locus of control
- Improved risk-taking abilities
- Sense of normalcy
- Socialization and improved interpersonal skills
- Increased perception of quality of life and life satisfaction
- Stress reduction

What Disabilities It Can Help:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Cerebral palsy



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- Down syndrome
- Developmental delays
- Chromosome disorders
- Spina bifida
- Hypertonia
- Hypotonia
- Multiple sclerosis
- Traumatic brain injury
- Fragile X
- ADD and ADHD
- Sensory Processing Disorders
- Hearing and Visually Impaired
- Amputees
- And many more

Therapeutic vaulting and riding programs, like AHEAD With Horses, provide multidimensional benefits for children with special needs. Physically, it takes children with disabilities through a complex series of movements which follow normal developmental progression. Simultaneously, the horse rhythmically moves their body in a manner most similar to the human gait. This improves the children's posture, balance and muscle control by promoting strength, balance, coordination, flexibility and confidence during mobility. The steps that a trained therapy horse takes provide the rider with important constant sensory and physical input that stimulates the brain and facilitates motor planning in a manner that cannot be replicated by a machine or in a clinical setting.

Developmental milestones are important because they are the foundation of more complex actions that lead to autonomy and independence, such as the ability to feed oneself, going to the bathroom unassisted, focusing attention, following directions, giving someone a hug or say "I love you". It is vital for children with special needs to master these basic developmental milestones in order to learn more complex actions and ultimately be able to lead more independent and productive lives as they mature.

Mentally, vaulting and therapeutic riding increase concentration and improve sequential thoughts, motor planning and attention. This ultimately helps children with special needs to develop spatial awareness and even learn to speak. Emotionally, it provides the opportunity for children to bond with the horse, instructors and volunteers, building confidence and trust. Contact with the horse through vaulting provides a non-competitive setting for learning where children with special needs develop self-discipline and self-confidence. Most importantly, the sheer sense of joy raises their spirits and brings smiles to their faces. Socially, therapeutic riding and vaulting nurtures a positive self-image. For what is often the first time in their lives, children with severe disabilities can experience a sense of independence. In addition, being outdoors in a rustic setting allows clients and their families to gain therapeutic benefits while enjoying nature.



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AHEAD With Horses Inc

(Accelerated Habilitation Education And Development)

AHEAD With Horses has over 50 years of experience providing innovative, unique, highly motivating and effective therapy, education and recreation through horses and related experiences to disabled / disadvantaged / special-needs children in the Los Angeles area and has earned recognition educationally, medically and scientifically. Through vaulting (gymnastics on a moving horse), even severely disabled children learn and achieve with the goal of enabling them to lead more independent and productive lives.

Two unique aspects of this therapy are the immediacy of response and visibility of its effectiveness across multiple domains (motor, communication, social, emotional, cognitive, self-help, vocational). As AWH Founder Liz Helms described, it is the horse's movement that changes the brain, which in turn changes the body and the individual's ability to integrate and process sensory input. Predicated on the philosophy that everyone can learn and achieve, the emphasis is on working with those others feel lack the ability to respond. Most have not responded to traditional forms of therapy and/or education, or are not eligible for other services. Here at AHEAD With Horses, EVERY CHILD LEARNS and ACHIEVES and FINDS SUCCESS.

Program services are comprehensive and through horses combine the benefits of physical, occupational, speech, educational and recreational therapy and other developmental services such as behavior management, sensorimotor services, etc. All of this is done while most children do not even consider it therapy; it is just getting to go and "ride their horse" and have fun. Our program has been especially effective in helping children with autism spectrum disorder- which, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now affects 1 in 59 children; 1 in 37 for boys- improving their ability to focus attention, control negative behaviors, acquire positive behaviors, learn to deal with sensory issues and develop physical and social skills.

Our track record of success is comprised of many small moments and personal achievements, such as this one: Xavier H., 7, who has cerebral palsy uses a wheelchair and is not able to sit up independently. Xavier is one of the children that needs to ride with their Instructor. When he started, Xavier was unable to lift his head up and hold it there on his own to see where he was going. Since he has been receiving therapy with AHEAD With Horses, Xavier is able to keep his head up for longer periods of time without the assistance of his Instructor. He has also grown in strength and needs less help to sit up while his gentle and patient therapy horse walks around with him. That movement is very different from sitting in his wheelchair and has many more benefits. You can see the joy on Xavier's face as he thanks his horse and gives him a gentle pet and feels the horse's soft fur.

If you would like to find out more about the AHEAD With Horses program in Shadow Hills, CA or mobile program in Brentwood, days and times available, or cost, please contact Michelle Newman, Executive Director at (818) 767 – 6373. www.AWHLA.org And you can like us on [www.Facebook.com/AHEADWithHorsesInc](https://www.facebook.com/AHEADWithHorsesInc).

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